

Betagh, Thomas (1738-1811) jesuit, was born in Kells, Co. Meath into a family of tanners which had lost its lands in the Cromwellian Wars. When they moved to Dublin he attended John Austin's Jesuit school at Saul's Court where his academic abilities were recognised. He was sent, probably in 1752, to the Jesuit seminary at Pont-à-Mousson in Lorraine. He later taught languages and theology there. Ordained in 1762 he returned to Ireland in 1769 or 1770 and taught in Saul's Court. After the 1773 suppression of the Jesuits he became a secular priest. Appointed curate to SS Michael and John's parish, he continued his educational activity. In 1781 he set up the first of a number of parochial free schools for poor boys. By 1784 he was in charge of Saul's Court which was operating as a secondary school for both secular and regular clergy. It played a pivotal role in the reestablishment of the Catholic Church in Dublin and Leinster as the Penal Laws eased, functioning as a bridge between the province's local schools and the continental network of universities and Irish seminaries. It also facilitated good relations between secular and regular clergy. Saul's Court helped produce a generation of ecclesiastics willing to seek an accommodation with the government. Among its many distinguished pupils were Daniel Murray, archbishop of Dublin and Peter Kenney SJ, founder of Clongowes Wood College. Betagh was an important link too between the old Jesuits who joined before the 1773 suppression and those of the restoration, after 1814. Following the death of John Fullam in 1793 he became responsible for funds destined to finance the society's restoration and was instrumental in sending a number of his students to Carlow and later to Palermo for that purpose. A temperate man, in October 1796 he was described in William Corbet's account of the priests of Dublin as a political moderate (*National Archives*, Dublin, Rebellion Papers 620/25/170). In 1799 he became parish priest of SS Michael and John's. He was named vicar general and was a noted preacher. He opposed the proposed government veto on the appointment of Irish bishops in 1808. In 1810 he laid the foundation stone for the new SS Michael and John's. Following his death on 16 February 1811 he was interred in George's Hill Presentation Convent. Moved later to the new SS Michael and John's, since 1990 he lies in Glasnevin cemetery.